

SAMARITAN CORRESPONDENCE COURSES

OUR STORY TOO

LESSON 6, THE CONTEXT OF MODERN CHRISTIANITY

In Lesson 6 you will explore the religious context of late twentieth century Christianity. This sixth and final lesson in Section A of the course brings the historical development of Christianity up to the present day.

The reading assignments for this sixth lesson are

- (a) Frankiel's book *Christianity*, pages 120 - 126
- (b) the enclosed essay "Varieties of American Christianity"
- (c) two articles in the April 1986 issue of *Theology Today*
 - Anderson, Fred, "Protestant Worship Today", pages 63 - 74.
 - Martinez, German, "Catholic Liturgical Reform", pages 52 - 62.

These articles by Anderson and Martinez articles explain where the Roman Catholic Church and the various Protestant denominations are today as reflected in their worship and how they got to this place.

Read these pages all the way through. Then go through them again, section by section, and answer the study questions in the space provided.

Then make a clear photocopy of your study question pages with your responses, or type your responses on separate sheets of paper. Send this second copy of your responses back for grading to the Samaritan faculty member who coordinates correspondence courses. The address is on the cover letter.



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(A) Christianity, Chapter 5, pages 120-126

- (1) In the contemporary world there are many churches offering many different versions of the Christian life. Frankiel maintains that three of the most pervasive issues/problems facing modern Christianity are religious pluralism, disbelief, and an emphasis on the experiential.

The first of these issues that modern Christians have to face is religious pluralism, both inner diversity within Christianity and interaction with other religions outside of Christianity.

Diversity within Christianity is not new; it goes back to the very beginnings of this faith. In a one-paragraph essay explain what is new about pluralism within Christianity today.

- (2) Although churches involved in the ecumenical movement are not moving toward any theological synthesis or consensus in Christian doctrine, they are finding some unity in a renewed interest in ritual and _____. A recent example of this is the document produced by the World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*.
- (3) The greater presence today of non-Christian religions in Europe and North America has led Christians to _____

Today Christians must respond to the question whether their religion _____

In a one-paragraph essay explain the "modern attitude of tolerance" regarding religion and why this challenges the traditional Christian belief in the universality of Christ.

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- (4) Throughout its history Christianity has depended heavily on belief as an integral part of faith, that is, belief in _____.

Scientific and philosophical developments in the past few centuries have called into question some cherished Christian doctrines, regarding the Bible, Jesus, miracles, etc. These developments have included:

- (a) _____ in geology and biology
- (b) _____ and historical studies
- (c) the general _____

- (5) Frankiel points out that intellectual challenges to Christian faith are not new and that in fact Christianity faced a similar crisis in the 12th and 13th centuries. At that time Greek philosophy seemed to be threatening the very foundation of Christian belief.

The Christian theologian/scholar at that time who "saved the day" was _____. In a one-paragraph essay explain what this theologian accomplished, and what it would mean to utilize a similar strategy today.

- (6) Ever since the Reformation, and especially in the last 200 years, Christians have focused increasingly on _____ as the center and even the measure of Christianity.

This has led to a breakdown of:
_____ and _____,
and to the development of:
_____ and _____.

- (7) The ideal of experiential religion is that each person finds his or her own way to God. The very nature of experiential religion prohibits this ideal, however. What develops is just the opposite. Explain in a one-paragraph essay.

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- (B) *Varieties of American Christianity*
essay on pages 75-78 of this course manual.
- (1) - (9) Match one of these U.S.A. Protestant terms with the descriptions below:
- | | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| (a) Pentecostalists | (b) Charismatics | (c) Evangelicals |
| (d) Fundamentalists | (e) Mainline/Old-line | |
- (1) __ They founded the ecumenical movement.
- (2) __ A movement that swept Christian churches in the 1970's, beginning in Roman Catholic churches and spreading to mainline churches.
- (3) __ Those who called themselves this rejected "liberal" trends in Protestantism in the early 20th century.
- (4) __ They place their faith in a literal interpretation of an inerrant Bible.
- (5) __ They emphasize evangelism, conservative doctrinal orthodoxy, traditional morality, and strict interpretation of the Bible
- (6) __ They are the historic Protestant churches that are strongest in the North and Midwest.
- (7) __ A movement that sprang up at the beginning of the 20th century which emphasized the descent of the Holy Spirit.
- (8) __ Their emphasis on the gifts of the Spirit has not led to new denominations or sects.
- (9) __ Their emphasis on the gifts of the Spirit did lead to the formation of new denominations.
- (10) Have you personally held any of the perceptions of Pentecostal and Evangelical Christians that many Ecumenical Christians have had? Explain in a one-paragraph essay.
- (11) Have you personally held any of the perceptions of Ecumenical Christians that many Pentecostal and Evangelical Christians have had? Explain in a one-paragraph essay.

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- (12) Which one or two of the strengths of Pentecostal/Evangelical Christianity is most important to you? Explain in a one-paragraph essay.
- (13) Which one or two of the strengths of Ecumenical Christianity is most important to you? Explain in a one-paragraph essay.
- (14) The gradual convergence of the positions of Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Ecumenical Christians has included:
- (a) the re-thinking of Ecumenical Churches regarding _____ and
 - (b) the re-thinking of Evangelical and Pentecostal regarding _____
- (15) How has the "mainstreaming" of Pentecostal and Evangelical Churches in the U.S. led to a greater openness on their part to dialogue with Ecumenical Churches? Explain in one paragraph.
- (16) Which of the unresolved tensions between these different forms of Christianity in the U.S. is most important to you personally? Explain in a one-paragraph essay.

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(C) "Protestant Worship Today"

Theology Today, April 1986, pages 63-74

- (1) - (3) Match the following terms with the descriptions below:
- (a) the liturgical left (b) the liturgical right
(c) the liturgical center
- (1) __ those Protestant traditions/denominations whose liturgy is prescribed by the service book
- (2) __ those Protestant traditions/denominations for whom a service book optional, but who rely heavily on one for sacraments and rites
- (3) __ those Protestant traditions/denominations which reject service books as a violation of their freedom of worship according to the Word of God
- (4) Which one of these three categories above does Fred Anderson focus on in this article? _____
- (5) Anderson states: "The single most important factor in Protestant worship today is that it is in dialogue with more than its own tradition, seeking to respond to the heritage of Christian worship in a way which will equip the saints for ministry."

Explain in a one-paragraph essay why so many Protestant churches are moving away from an emphasis on their tradition only and moving toward a more catholic ("universal") approach.

- (6) According to Anderson, "The second greatest factor having an impact upon Protestant worship today is the move to restore Scripture to a central place in worship."

One of the primary themes and slogans of the Protestant Reformation on the 1500's was "Sola Scriptura" ("Scripture alone"). What had happened in many Protestant churches to undermine "Sola Scriptura"? Explain in one paragraph.

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- (7) Explain in two paragraphs how the use of a lectionary has restored Scripture to a central place in Protestant worship and revitalized Protestant preaching.

- (8) Anderson states: "A third major development in Protestant worship is the recovery of the Christian year". Explain in a one-paragraph essay how "The calendar has helped Protestant churches order their worship-life after the pattern of Jesus Christ's life and ministry, rather than by civil time, ecumenical observance, or church program concerns..."

- (9) Anderson maintains that a fourth major development in Protestant worship is "the recovery of sacraments as integral to worship on the Lord's Day." In a one-paragraph essay explain how both Baptism and the Lord's Supper (Holy Communion, Eucharist) "are being taken more seriously as integral to being a member of the body of Christ."

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(10) A fifth area of renewal in Protestant worship, according to Anderson, is music. This includes:

- (a) the rediscovery of _____ as a book for singing
- (b) a reconsideration of the place in worship of "sacred music" since it has become theatrical and for purposes of entertainment, rather than for _____
- (c) the development of professional organizations for church musicians to train and to _____
- (d) the use of music in worship
 - as a means to draw people together in corporate _____
 - as a vehicle for interpreting and proclaiming _____
 - as a form of corporate _____

(11) A sixth major development in worship affecting Protestant churches, according to Anderson, is the impact of the leadership of women in worship.

This development has strengthened the historic principle of _____ through _____, and it has also sensitized the churches to the language they use to speak about and to address both _____ and _____.

What seems to be the emerging consensus regarding language about God?

What seems to be the emerging consensus regarding language about human beings?

(12) The seventh major development within Protestant worship, according to Anderson, is "the publication of new service books, hymnals, and other worship materials."

Which of these seven developments within Protestant worship is most important to you personally? Explain why in a one-paragraph essay

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(D) "Catholic Liturgical Reform"
Theology Today, April 1986, pages 52-62

- (1) The Council of the Roman Catholic Church called Vatican II (1963-65) revolutionized Roman Catholic worship throughout the world by inaugurating _____.

These concrete pastoral efforts of Vatican II were for the dual purpose of:

- (a) _____
and
(b) _____

- (2) The achievements of this liturgical renewal include:

- (a) it revived _____
(b) it promoted _____
(c) it made a reality _____
(d) it enhanced _____
(e) it developed _____
(f) it opened the door to _____
(g) it clearly set forth worship _____

Despite all these achievements, Martinez maintains that this liturgical reform ultimately fails to meet the contemporary challenges of the Roman Catholic Church. The new order of worship that was implemented was essentially "a restoration of the past, with a timid attempt of adaptation to the present."

- (3) According to sociologists who have studied the Roman Catholic Church of the last twenty years, "the popular masses have reacted negatively, either falling off more and more in liturgical attendance, or holding on to ancient ritual forms."

Martinez maintains that the two main negative underlying factors in this reform are (a) an imbalance in the ritual presentations of the religious story and (b) the failure to clarify the complexities of religious symbolism.

For (a) read carefully the section on "The Irrelevant Spirituality". In a one-paragraph essay explain how the language of the liturgy does not articulate a contemporary spirituality.

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(3) (cont'd)

For (b) read carefully the sections on "The Eclipse of Sacredness and Wonder" and "The Shallowness of Functionalism". In an essay of one or two paragraphs explain how the new liturgy does not meet the need of many people for transcendent sacredness and symbolism in worship.

(4) What form of worship does Martinez recommend in place of daily Masses and Masses for every occasion? Briefly explain.

(5) What are the benefits (real and possible) from the involvement of lay persons (especially women) in preaching and worship, according to Martinez? Explain in a one-paragraph essay.

(6) Some view the worldwide standardization of the liturgy as an asset, but Martinez sees it as rigid and stifling uniformity. In a one-paragraph essay explain his call for new ritual creativity.

ESSAY - VARIETIES OF AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY

At no time in the history of Christianity has there been as much diversity of religion and tolerance (even appreciation) of such diversity as in late 20th century U.S.

To understand this phenomenon, we must first look at the terms that U.S. Christians use for themselves and for other Christians. The following are brief definitions of terms compiled by Gerald Renner, Religion Writer for the newspaper *The Hartford Courant*, and which appeared in that paper April 17, 1987.

The following are terms that describe various styles of Christian worship.

■ **Mainline or Old-line:** The term is used to describe the historic Protestant denominations, strong in the North, that influenced American culture, founded the ecumenical movement and proclaim a "social Gospel" of liberal reform. Generally considered among the mainline churches are the United Church of Christ, U.S. Episcopal Church, United Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Lutheran Church in America and some others.

■ **Evangelicals:** A loose term used to encompass an estimated 40 million Christians, including many in the mainline churches, who emphasize evangelism, conservative doctrinal orthodoxy, traditional morality and strict-to-literal interpretation of the Bible.

■ **Fundamentalists:** A self-description coined by those who rejected liberal trends in Protestantism in the early 20th century. Fundamentalists adhere to a Puritan moralism that frowns on liquor, social dancing and movies; they place their faith in a literal interpretation of a Bible they say has no errors, and they believe in the imminence of the Second Coming.

■ **Pentecostals:** Pentecostalism sprang up at the beginning of the 20th century in many fundamentalist churches and led to the formation of several new denominations, including the Assemblies of God and the Holiness Church of God. They often were derisively called "Holy Rollers." The movement took its name from the New Testament account of how the Holy Spirit came down as "tongues of fire" upon the Apostles and instilled them with zeal 50 days after the resurrection of Jesus. Pentecost means 50 days.

■ **Charismatics:** In the 1970s a new Pentecostalism, called the charismatic movement, again swept Christian churches. It began among Roman Catholics in Pittsburgh in the late 1960s and spread to the mainline denominations. Among the "gifts" claimed by the charismatic and Pentecostals are discernment to see the will of God, prophecy, healing and "speaking in tongues," an undecipherable murmuring that sometimes takes on a musical lilt and that charismatics say is ancient prayer language. The movement has been absorbed without the creation of major new sects but has charged some churches with new vitality.

GERALD RENNER

These various kinds of Christians are finally beginning to talk with and understand each other. The following are reflections on a Consultation Between Pentecostal/Evangelical and Ecumenical Churches that occurred at Fuller Theological Seminary (Pasadena, California) in October 1986. This consultation included 70 persons from Protestant (confessional, Holiness, Evangelical, and Pentecostal), Roman Catholic, and Orthodox Churches. These reflections are based on summaries of the consultation by Jerry Sandridge (Assemblies of God) of Oral Roberts University, and Thaddeus Horgan (Roman Catholic) of Graymoore Ecumenical Institute.

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I. WHAT SEPARATES THE PENTECOSTAL/EVANGELICAL AND ECUMENICAL CHURCHES?

- A. The perceptions (often mis-perceptions) of the other group.
 - 1. Ecumenicals see Pentecostals/Evangelicals as...
 - a. Anti-intellectual
 - b. Elitist: intolerant and exclusionary
 - c. Pietistic: no recognition of corporate or structural sin
 - d. Imposing a Western cultural ethic throughout the world
 - e. Unconcerned about threatening world issues such as poverty, injustice, and nuclear war
 - 2. Pentecostals/Evangelicals see Ecumenicals as...
 - a. Advocating a super church as the expression of Christian Unity
 - b. Losing spiritual vitality in a cerebral approach to faith
 - c. Ridiculing Pentecostal behavior
 - d. Not interested in evangelism
 - e. Unaware of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit
- B. The two groups have traditionally treated the other as "the enemy"...
 - 1. Building their movements as reaction to the other
 - 2. Defining themselves via the negative ("We are not like them")
 - 3. Feeding their mutual fears
 - a. Pentecostals/Evangelicals fear the theology of Ecumenical Christianity
 - b. Ecumenicals fear the exuberance and spontaneity of the Pentecostals/Evangelicals
 - c. Pentecostals/Evangelicals fear that their becoming involved with Ecumenical Churches would diminish their evangelistic fervor
 - d. Ecumenicals fear the church growth of the Pentecostals/Evangelicals

II. WHAT ARE THE STRENGTHS OF THE PENTECOSTALS/EVANGELICALS?

- A. Expressive and creative worship, with an emphasis on charismata
- B. A recognition of the importance of quality evangelism
 - 1. All Christians have a "second vocation" as evangelists
 - 2. A strong emphasis on church growth
- C. An openness to the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit
- D. An awareness of the transforming power of a personal commitment to Christ

III. WHAT ARE THE STRENGTHS OF THE ECUMENICALS?

- A. An awareness of the importance and power of the Christian Community (the Church) in the faith experience

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- B. An openness to a mutual recognition of ministry
- C. A recognition of the importance and power of the Sacraments
- D. An openness to dialogue around theological insights
- E. A demonstrated willingness to minister to the causes and effects of poverty and injustice

IV. WHAT DOES THE FUTURE LOOK LIKE?

- A. There has been a gradual, but significant, convergence of the positions of the two groups.
 - 1. The Ecumenical Churches are re-thinking their stance on evangelism. These churches have always called persons to Christ, but have muted the call in order not to be classified with "them" (the Pentecostals/Evangelicals). The Ecumenical Churches now realize that the muted call is not being heard.
 - 2. The Pentecostal/Evangelical Churches are re-thinking their stance on social issues. These churches have always recognized Christ's challenge in Matthew 25 and Luke 4, but they have been uncertain on how to respond to the realities of poverty and injustice while maintaining an evangelistic thrust. They now realize that doing nothing is not the will of Christ.
- B. There has been an evolution that fosters the convergence of the two groups.
 - 1. The Pentecostal/Evangelical Churches have become established and part of mainstream America. Their new position has instilled a confidence and inner security from which they feel more comfortable in entering into conversations with "old line" churches. This generation of Pentecostals/Evangelicals are discovering that they need not be reactionary (they do not need an "enemy") in order to survive.
 - 2. The Ecumenical Churches have come to realize that the Holy Spirit is working in and through the Pentecostal/Evangelical Churches and that the Ecumenical Churches have much to learn from them.
- C. Conclusions
Each group has much to offer the other and the work of the Holy Spirit could truly thrive if each were willing to build on the other's strengths. But we have not yet found a way to set aside the hostility that has developed over the years, because few are consciously and consistently working toward reconciliation.

Reconciliation requires that we take seriously the positions held by the other and that we build the new relationship upon our common ground. Reconciliation requires that we talk in order to discover how deep the differences really are.

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IV. C. Conclusions (cont'd)

Between Pentecostals/Evangelicals and Ecumenicals, there are still many unresolved tensions:

- | | | |
|---|-----|----------------------------|
| 1. Doctrine & tradition | vs. | Freedom in the Spirit |
| 2. Evangelism | vs. | Tolerance |
| 3. The homogenous church | vs. | The heterogenous church |
| 4. Personal piety | vs. | The community of believers |
| 5. The appropriate role of the church in society and politics | | |
| 6. What it means to declare that the Bible is "The Word of God" | | |
| 7. Women in leadership roles in the church | | |
| 8. And many more. | | |

Still, as David Du Plessis (Fuller Theological Seminary) said, "The ecumenical movement must be pentecostal, and the pentecostal movement must be ecumenical because the Holy Spirit cannot be contained and operates everywhere."

